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ABSTRACT

The critical literacy program described in this lesson plan encourages sixth- through eighth-grade students to question what they are reading by providing them with the language and skills needed to analyze a text. During four to five 45-minute lessons, students will: describe key information of a text from a prescribed viewpoint; discuss differing viewpoints; discover the importance of viewpoint in a text; and compose alternative viewpoints of a selected text. The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. A copy of the story "The House" is attached. (PM)

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Critical Literacy: Point of View

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Grade Band

6-8

Estimated Lesson Time

About four to five 45-minute class sessions

Overview

Many students read without questioning a text or analyzing the author's viewpoint. This lesson encourages sixth- through eighth-grade students to question what they are reading by providing them with the language and skills needed to analyze a text. Students learn to look at the author's purpose and viewpoint, and also recognize gaps in the text. Extension activities include debating a fairy tale using different character viewpoints.

From Theory to Practice

Simpson, A. (1996). Critical questions: Whose questions? *The Reading Teacher, 50,* 118-127.

- Stories are not reflections of reality but are selective versions of it, told from a particular view.
- The author positions the reader to respond to a story in particular ways through the use of language, point of view, etc.
- There are a number of approaches to the teaching of critical text analysis, including juxtaposing texts, supplying alternative endings, role-playing, and role reversal.

Student Objectives

Students will

- Describe key information of a text from a prescribed viewpoint
- Discuss differing viewpoints
- Discover the importance of viewpoint in a text
- Compose alternative viewpoints of a selected text

Resources

- The House (for overhead)
- The Cinderella Project
- Fairy Tale Quiz
- SurLaLune Fairy Tales
- *A Wolf at the Door and other Retold Fairy Tales* by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling (Aladdin Paperbacks, 2001) [optional text]

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- *The Three Little Pigs* (at least two different versions of the tale)
- *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs by A. Wolf* by Jon Scieszka (Dutton Books, 1995)
- *Twelve Impossible Things before Breakfast* by Jane Yolen (Magic Carpet Books, 2001) [optional text]
- 2 sheets of chart paper
- A wide selection of fairy tales for reference
- Interactive Venn diagram

Instructional Plan

Preparation

1. Create an overhead of The House.
2. Secure copies of the texts referenced in RESOURCES and other fairy tale selections. Your school librarian may allow you to check books out and keep them in your classroom as a resource for your students. Students are also encouraged to bring in their own books from home.
3. Review and bookmark the following websites:
    - Cinderella Project. This website includes a dozen English versions of the traditional fairy tale Cinderella. Select a few versions of the tale to use as a model in the classroom.
    - SurLaLune Fairy Tales. This website includes many annotated fairy tales with illustrations, history, cross-cultural connections, and modern interpretations. This is a great resource for students to use at home, especially if computer access is limited within the classroom.
    - Fairy Tale Quiz. This online, interactive trivia game is another great activity for students to do at home or in the classroom.

Instruction and Activities

1. Opening activity

Divide the class into two groups. Explain that they are going to be reading a short piece of text and their task is to remember as many details as possible from the text. Tell one half of the class that they are burglars and the other half of the class that they are real estate agents, without divulging the roles to the opposite groups. Turn on the overhead of The House and read it aloud to your students. While you are reading, students should not be taking notes. Once the reading is complete, turn off the overhead and ask students to list as many details as they can remember about the house from the text (e.g., descriptions of rooms, items located in the house, layout of house). This part of the activity should be limited to 2-3 minutes. Students then share their lists within their group. (For larger classes, students can be broken into 4 groups, 2 for each prescribed role.) Distribute chart paper to each group so that students can record their lists. Hang both sheets of chart paper on the front wall of the classroom. Discuss the similarities and differences between the two lists, and allow students to guess the viewpoint of the other group. Discuss whether the lists would be different from another viewpoint (e.g., child, interior decorator, pet dog).

2. Before reading

Activate students' prior knowledge by asking for volunteers to retell the story of *The Three Little Pigs*. Most of your students will have some background knowledge of this popular fairy tale; however, each

student will have a slightly different recollection of the story.

3. Read aloud

Read aloud two different versions of *The Three Little Pigs*. You may select a traditional version [e.g., *The Three Little Pigs* by James Marshall (Dutton, 1989)] and a culturally diverse version [e.g., *The Three Little Cajun Pigs* by Berthe Amoss (MTC Press, 1999)]. Depending on your needs, you may choose to use different cultural versions with your class. Model a compare/contrast of the two versions by using a Venn diagram. This activity serves as a model for the next part of the lesson.

4. Online investigation

Schedule time in your computer lab for this part of the lesson. Group students in pairs at each computer and have them investigate the SurLaLune Fairy Tales website. Working with a partner allows students to engage in discussion throughout their investigation. Partners will then select two different versions of the same tale and complete a compare/contrast using the online interactive Venn diagram. Students should print their Venn diagram when this task is completed. Once students are finished, if there is time remaining they can investigate the Fairy Tale Quiz website for the balance of the class time.

5. Follow-up discussion

Upon returning to the classroom, talk about and share the different versions of the fairy tales that were explored on the SurLaLune Fairy Tales website. Some interesting discussions usually develop at this point and students often want to go back to the website to look at other tales. They can use the computers in the classroom or visit the website at home.

6. Scaffolding

Introduce the next story by engaging students in a discussion about gossip and rumors. Talk about what happens when they overhear something in the hallway and how the spreading of a rumor can often be misinterpreted. This gives students something that they can identify and connect with in their own daily lives.

7. Read aloud

Read aloud *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs by A. Wolf*.

8. Wrap up

Discuss similarities and differences between this text and a more traditional story of *The Three Little Pigs*. Draw on different versions of fairy tales from the SurLaLune Fairy Tales website using the students' Venn diagram printouts. Students recognize the purpose of the lesson; the focus being that there are not only different versions of a story, but different viewpoints to consider when reading a story.

9. Writing activity

Students are to select one fairy tale and rewrite the tale from the viewpoint of a different character or object within the tale (i.e., a "twisted tale"). Students can use the books selected from the library or online Web resources to help make their selection. Although you may encourage students to use a favorite fairy tale from their childhood, they may also choose a new tale that they have never read before.

Depending on the group of students, it may be necessary to provide additional examples of "twisted tales" to help with their writing activity. Some additional resources are the online Cinderella Project, *Twelve Impossible Things Before Breakfast,* and *A Wolf at the Door and Other Retold Fairy Tales.* Typically, these stories can be read aloud in class on each day of the lesson to give students more examples and models for their own writing.

10. Author's share

Students share their "twisted tales" with the class. Their tales can be read in front of the class or their point of view can be shared. Collect a copy of the story for assessment purposes.

11. Journal

Students answer the following questions for the fairy tale they selected:

- How does the way the text is written help shape your interpretation?
- How does this text lend itself to alternative interpretations?

These questions were selected from: *A Measure of Success* by Fran Claggett (Heinemann, 1996).

Extensions

- Create a classroom book containing all of the "twisted tales" written by the students.
- As a social studies extension, discuss how history is usually told from a particular viewpoint. In addition, culturally diverse versions of tales can be integrated into units of study.
- Storytelling. Students learn how to tell their story in front of an audience (e.g., a class of younger children).
- Debating. Select volunteers to debate one version of a tale from different character viewpoints. Students should already be familiar with debating.
- Mock trial. Use *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs by A. Wolf* as a model for this activity. Students volunteer for different roles (e.g., judge, jury, lawyers, 3 pigs, wolf). Most students are familiar with courtroom proceedings from television programs. Some guidelines should be developed ahead of time. For example, lawyers are limited to "time on the floor" to present their arguments and the judge and jury make the final ruling. The model tale can be followed by new "court cases" based on the "twisted tales" that students have written.

Student Assessment/Reflections

- Teacher observation of dialogue between students and anecdotal notes based on class discussions
- The student's Venn diagram printout
- The student's "twisted tale" written from a varying viewpoint
- The student's journal responses to the questions

IRA/NCTE Standards

1 - Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2 - Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

5 - Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

8 - Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

11 - Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

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The House

By Laurie Henry

As I entered the front door, the marble floor glistened before me. The entryway opened to a grand staircase, which wound its way to the second level. My heels clicked across the cold, white floor as I proceeded to the living room on my left. A giant fireplace stretched across one end of the room. The impressive mantelpiece showcased a golden egg and porcelain figurines. A painting of sunflowers hung on the center of the wall. The white carpeting looked as if it had never been stepped on, and the entertainment center sprawled across the back wall.

I turned around to face the dining room. A golden chandelier hung above a great mahogany table. A bank of French doors opened to a wrap-around deck at the back of the house. A lighted hutch contained crystal goblets and gold-edged dinnerware. Proceeding down the hallway, I discovered a custom kitchen on my left, opposite the far end of the dining room. The sleek counters were free of clutter. Cabinets hung on every inch of wall space. A breakfast nook looked out over the back garden.

I soon retraced my steps to the entryway and ascended the stairs. A short hallway welcomed me to the second level of the house. To my left and at the front of the house was a small bedroom set up as a home office. The remainder of the upstairs consisted of a master bedroom suite. Two walk-in closets flanked the entrance to the master bedroom. No doubt, one closet was for him and the other one was for her. The matching bedroom furniture consisted of two dressers and night stands on either side of a four-poster bed. A wooden chest sat atop each dresser. A large bathroom sat off to the right side with double sinks inside. A whirlpool tub and shower stall lined the far wall.

I slowly retreated and returned to the lower level and out the front door. I shall return to this exquisite abode.

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